

Women's Human Rights Alliance: Overview of Irish Health Policy

This paper sets out the main policy documents concerning health services in Ireland. The health service is organised as a two-tier service, made up of the public health care system and the private health care system. The government's objective to expand health services is to provide more services in the private sector, rather than invest in public health services. There have also been a number of initiatives to improve the way in which services are provided to disadvantaged individuals and communities.

Quality and Fairness, a Health System for You (Department of Health and Children, 2001). This remains the overarching strategy for the health service. Equity and fairness is a central principle and there are 121 actions for developing the health service. There are targets for implementing national anti-poverty and health targets to reduce health inequalities (premature mortality, Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees, and for low birth weight babies). Many of the goals and actions set out in the strategy are yet to be fully implemented.

Primary Care: A New Direction (Department of Health and Children, 2001). The Primary Care Strategy sets of the goal that 90-95% of health needs will be met through primary health care. This is seen as being central to meeting health needs and in providing an accessible and good quality health care system. The strategy is currently being rolled out across the country.

National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service (Department of Health and Children 2008-13). This strategy sets out a plan for the involvement of service users as a key element of patient-centred care. There is a goal to prioritise the involvement of socially excluded groups.

Vision for Change (Department of Health and Children, 2006). This sets out a strategy for enhancing mental health services in Ireland, particularly community based services. The Mental Health Commission has noted the failure of the government to implement the strategy.

National Intercultural Health Strategy, 2007-2012, (Health Service Executive, 2008). The National Intercultural Health Strategy aims to respond appropriately to the health needs of new and well established migrants. Actions aim to make services more responsive to minority ethnic communities in areas such as improved awareness of staff, interpretation services and tools for improved health care provision.

Traveller Health a National Strategy 2002-2005. (Department of Health and Children, 2002)

This document is still very relevant to Travellers as it contains 122 health recommendations. There is currently an All Ireland Traveller Health Status Study being carried out with Traveller participation as peer researchers in conjunction with UCD. The information from this study should inform the next strategy going forward.

National Action Plan for Social Exclusion, 2007-2016. The National Action Plan sets out the goal of better health for the most disadvantaged communities, including the goal of establishing 500 Primary Care Teams by 2011

Equality Status Act 2000 and 2004. The Acts provide for the provision of equal treatment in health services. It includes the requirement (also set out in the 2005 Disability Act) to provide the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities.

Combat Poverty Agency: Building Healthy Communities and Primary Health Care Programme. These programmes have been funded by the Department of Health and Children to enhance community participation in local communities and in the development of the Primary Health Care Strategy. There has been funding for community groups to build capacity and involvement in these areas.